Chapter 30 Suirei

HIS NAME IS LAKAN.
A CERTAIN OFFICIAL HAS EXPRESSED A DESIRE TO MEET WITH YOU.
キュ SQUEAK
SQUEAK キュ
OH DEAR. TIRED ALREADY?
SIIIIGH...
HE'S THE REASON I'VE AVOIDED GOING ANYWHERE NEAR THE MILITARY.
I HAD A FEELING HE WAS THE ONE JINSHI HAD BEEN TALKING ABOUT.
NOTHING ESCAPES SUIREN'S KEEN EYE.
YOU'RE NOT EVEN HALFWAY DONE YET.
NOT AT ALL!
JUMP ギクッ
96

A BREAK AT LAST.
I'VE BEEN SERV-ING HERE FOR ABOUT TWO MONTHS NOW.
IN THAT SHORT TIME, I'VE COME TO LEARN THAT JINSHI HAS SOME REGULAR OBLIGATION EVERY TWO WEEKS.
HE TAKES A LONG, HOT BATH THE DAY PRIOR AND BURNS INCENSE BEFORE LEAVING.
WHEN THE MASTER IS OUT, THE AMOUNT OF CLEANING GOES UP.
SIIIP
WE'LL BE HAVING VEGETARIAN DISHES TONIGHT, SO DON'T NIBBLE ON ANY MEAT OR FISH TODAY.
ALL RIGHT.
IT'S AS IF WE'RE PURIFYING OUR-SELVES ...
OF COURSE I'D NEVER SAY SOME-THING SO UNCOUTH...

XIAO-MAO.
BUT ARE EUNUCHS EVEN ALLOWED TO CONDUCT RELIGIOUS RITUALS?
THE INDIVIDUALS WHO UNDERGO PURIFICATION TEND TO BE THOSE WHO LEAD RELIGIOUS CEREMONIES.
IF JINSHI IS OF NOBLE BIRTH, IT WOULDN'T BE UNUSUAL FOR HIM TO PRESIDE OVER A FEW SUCH FUNCTIONS.
COULD I ASK YOU TO RUN AN ERRAND THIS AFTER-NOON?
YES?
I NEED YOU TO PICK SOMETHING UP FOR ME FROM THE PHYSICIAN.
IF ONLY YOU WERE THIS EAGER ALL THE TIME...
JUST LEAVE IT TO ME!

...MY DESIRE TO HAVE A PEEK AT THE MEDICAL FACILITIES HERE WINS OUT.
AS LOATH AS I AM TO GET ANYWHERE NEAR YOU-KNOW-WHO...
IT'S PROBABLY CLOSE TO THE MILITARY GROUNDS SINCE THEY'RE ALWAYS GETTING HURT.
THE DISPENSARY IS ON THE EAST SIDE OF THE OUTER PALACE.
I'VE COME TO PICK UP SOME MEDICINE.
I'M SURE HIS SERVICES ARE NEEDED ON THE REGULAR AROUND HERE, AFTER ALL.
...BUT THE OUTER COURT PHYSI-CIAN MUST KNOW HIS STUFF.
BACK AT THE INNER PALACE, THE DISPENSARY IS A SHAM UNDER THE QUACK'S MANAGE-MENT...
DISPENSARY
EXCUSE ME.

FIDGET そわ
FIDGET そわ
PLEASE TAKE A SEAT.
THANK YOU.
THIS ONE, PLEASE.
OKAY.
FIDGET そわ
FIDGET そわ
そわそわAAAAAH!
OOH.
ALL THE BITTER SMELLS OVER-WHELMING MY SENSES...
INHALE すぅ...
I'M IN HEAVEN!

FIDGET
そわっ
NO, NO.
REIN IT IN, GIRL.
にじり SLINK
SLINK にじり
うずEAGER
I SO WISH I COULD HAVE A GOOD RUM-MAGE!
I WANT TO HAVE A PEEK IN EVERY SINGLE DRAWER IN THAT CABINET IN THE NEXT ROOM!
EAGER うず
GASP
WHAT ARE YOU DOING?

...TO PICK UP SOME MEDI-CINE.
I'M JUST HERE ...
OH...I RAN INTO HER BEFORE.
OH!
SO THIS COURT LADY'S NAME IS SUIREI.
I'VE COME FOR MEDICINE TO REFILL THE ON-HAND SUPPLY AT THE GUARD-HOUSE.
YES.
CAN I HELP YOU WITH SOME-THING TODAY...
...SUI-REI?
102

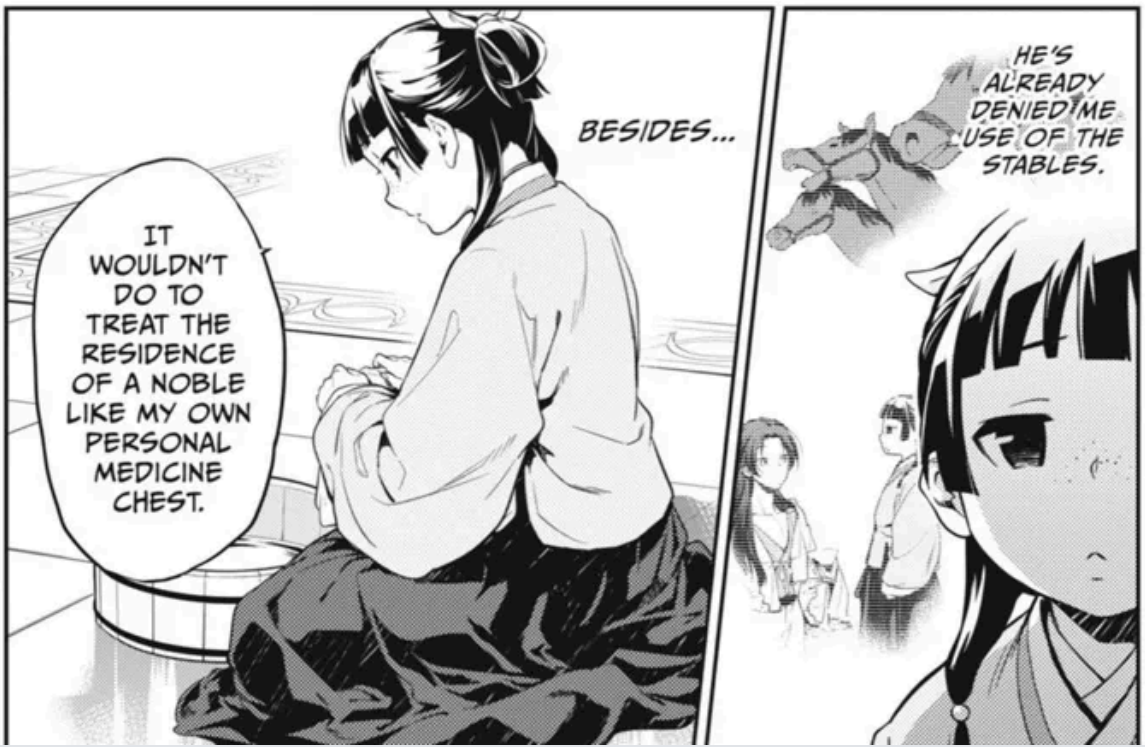
STAKE
THE GUARD-HOUSE ...?
COME TO THINK OF IT, WE WERE NEAR THE MILITARY WING THE LAST TIME WE MET.
IF SHE WORKS FOR THEM...
...THAT COULD BE WHY SHE SMELLED OF HERBS THEN.
GLARE
SHE FIXING ME WITH THAT LOOK AGAIN.
I GUESS I CAN'T ESCAPE HER DISDAIN HERE EITHER.
IF YOU'LL EXCUSE ME...
DO YOU NEED ANY-THING ELSE?
THAT WILL BE ALL.

AGH!
?
BY ALL RIGHTS, IT'S NO WORK FOR A COURT LADY.
MUMBLE
...AWW.
I SENSE WEIGHT IN THOSE WORDS.
LET'S SEE ABOUT THAT MEDI-CINE.
NEVER MIND ME.
EH, NO MATTER.
I DON'T NEED TO GO POKING MY NOSE INTO IT.
THIS HERE IS FAR MORE IMPOR-TANT!

...IS THIS POTATO FLOUR...?
?
LICK
ペロッ
A POW-DER.
EXCUSE ME, SUIREN.
CAN I GET YOU ANYTHING FROM THE PHYSICIAN TODAY?
OH MY.
I WON'T HAVE YOU SKIPPING OUT ON YOUR DUTIES, NOW.
THAT'S NOT WHAT I WAS AFTER.

YES, MA'AM.
SHE FOUND THEM.
WRING
...I KNOW YOU'RE HIDING STRANGE PLANTS IN THE STORE-ROOM.
I CAN'T ALLOW THAT EITHER, I'M AFRAID.
ALSO...
GLOOM

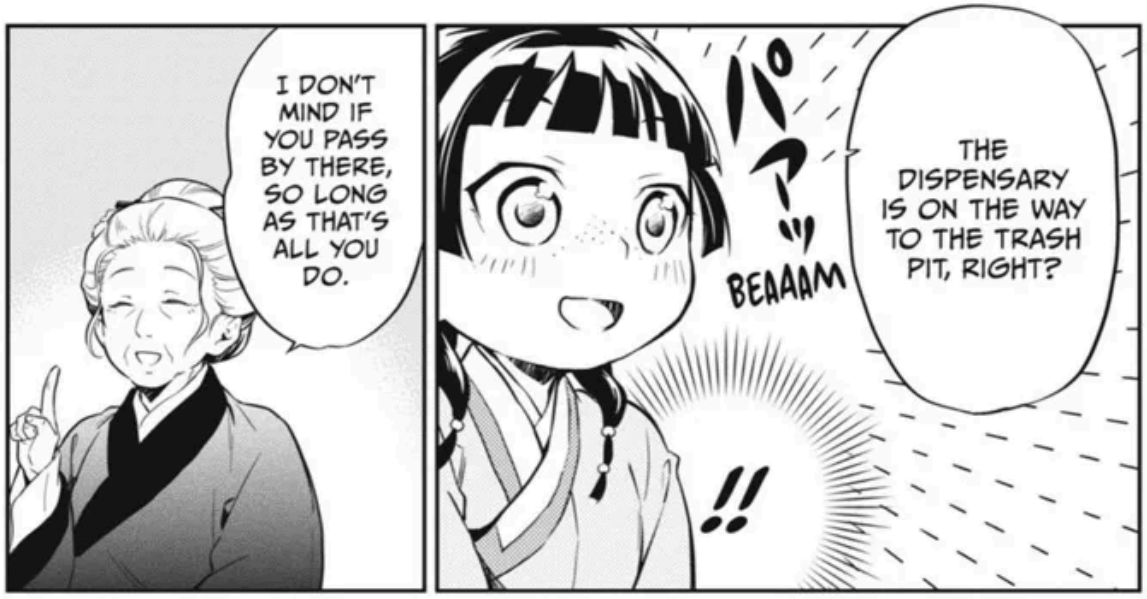
WE HAVE PLENTY OF EMPTY ROOMS, SO I'M SURE HE'D INDULGE YOU.
IF YOU FIND YOUR ROOM TOO SMALL, WHY NOT BRING IT UP WITH THE YOUNG MASTER?
SHE'S FAR MORE FORMIDABLE THAN HONG-NIANG.
THAT'S EXPE-RIENCE AND WISDOM FOR YOU.


IT WOULDN'T DO TO TREAT THE RESIDENCE OF A NOBLE LIKE MY OWN PERSONAL MEDICINE CHEST.
BESIDES...
HE'S ALREADY DENIED ME USE OF THE STABLES.

...BUT YOU'RE RATHER INTENT ON KNOWING YOUR PLACE.
MY.
MY.
YOU ALWAYS GIVE THE IMPRESSION THAT SUCH THINGS DON'T BOTHER YOU...
...AND IT'S ONLY BY A STRANGE TURN OF FATE THAT I'M HERE NOW.
WELL, I AM A GIRL OF LOWLY BIRTH...
BUT I WOULDN'T LIKE YOU TO THINK THAT THOSE OF NOBLE BIRTH...
...ARE SO DIFFERENT FROM US.
THAT'S TRUE.

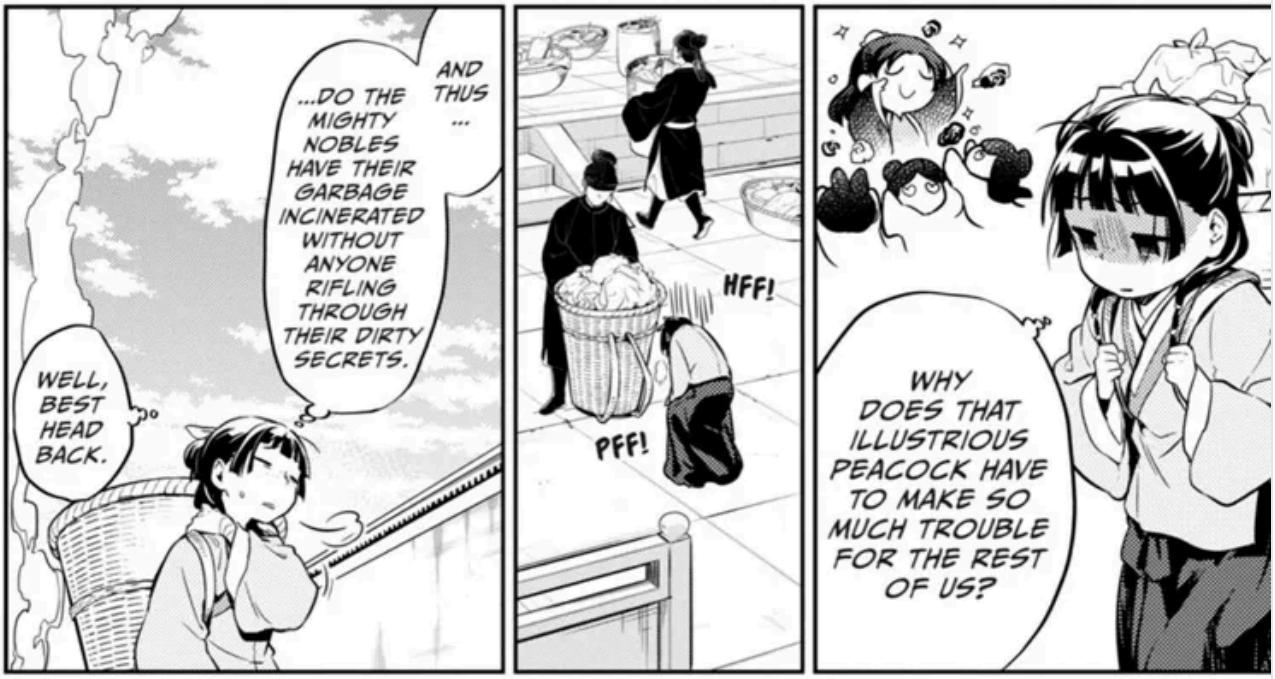
DON'T YOU THINK IT SILLY...
...TO BELIEVE THAT OUR BIRTHS ARE WHAT DEFINE US?
NO ONE, HIGH-BORN OR OTHER-WISE...
...CAN KNOW WHAT LIFE HOLDS IN STORE FOR US, AFTER ALL.
DO YOU REALLY BELIEVE THAT?
YES, I DO.
NOW, THEN!
I SUPPOSE IT'S TIME TO GIVE YOU YOUR NEXT TASK.
PAT
108

...SO I CAN'T ENTRUST THEM TO JUST ANYONE.
IT WOULD BE EASY FOR SOMEONE TO ROOT THROUGH THE BAGS WITHOUT LEAVE...
WOULD YOU DISPOSE OF THESE FOR ME?
HEFTY
HEFTY


I DON'T MIND IF YOU PASS BY THERE, SO LONG AS THAT'S ALL YOU DO.
!!?
BEAAAM
!!
THE DISPENSARY IS ON THE WAY TO THE TRASH PIT, RIGHT?

DOES THAT MEAN ...

DISPENSARY
...SHE'S OUT TO TORTURE ME?!


AND THUS ...
...DO THE MIGHTY NOBLES HAVE THEIR GARBAGE INCINERATED WITHOUT ANYONE RIFLING THROUGH THEIR DIRTY SECRETS.
WELL, BEST HEAD BACK.
HFF!
PFF!
WHY DOES THAT ILLUSTRIOUS PEACOCK HAVE TO MAKE SO MUCH TROUBLE FOR THE REST OF US?

THE SHAPE OF THESE LEAVES!
FWOOP
OOH!
THAT PLANT!
THIS SMELL!
SNIFF
SNIFF
DIG
DIG
I KNEW IT! GINGER!
WHAT'S IT DOING HERE AMONG THE WEEDS?

THERE'S A LITTLE HILL OVER YONDER.
I CAN MAKE OUT SOME HERBS THERE TOO.
BUT I DON'T THINK THAT'S REASON ENOUGH FOR IT TO BE GROWING WILD HERE.
PERHAPS THESE STABLES ARE SUPPLYING ALL THE NUTRIENTS IT NEEDS?
A VEGETABLE GARDEN...?
NO, WAIT, THESE AREN'T VEGETABLES.
THESE HERBS AND FLOWERS WITH THEIR CURIOUSLY STRONG ODORS...
THERE CAN BE NO DOUBT!
THIS IS A MEDICINAL HERB GARDEN!

WHAT DO YOU THINK YOU'RE DOING?
OOH!
OOOO
LOOOOOM
ずずずずず
SUIREI!
AGH!
OH NO!
MY BEING HERE IS UTTERLY SUSPECT! THERE'S NO EXPLAINING MYSELF!

I PLEAD INNOCENCE, MADAM.
I HAVE NOT YET PICKED A SINGLE HERB.
PLEASE CALM YOUR-SELF.
!!
じゃ
"YET"? SO YOU WERE GOING TO.
SHNK
SIGH...
PHEW!
A-AT LEAST SHE PUT DOWN THE SCYTHE.
OH PLEASE. IN WHAT KIND OF PALACE WOULD YOU BE LIABLE TO FIND FARMERS?
WE FARMERS JUST GET A HANKERING WHEN WE STUMBLE UPON A FERTILE SPOT OF LAND!

THIS ISN'T AN OFFICIAL LOCATION, SO YOU HAVE NO NEED TO FEAR MY REPRIMAND.
SHE'S WEEDING.
...SO I WOULDN'T DROP BY TOO OFTEN IF I WERE YOU.
BUT...
...THE PHYSICIAN KNOWS IT'S HERE...
PLUCK
PLUCK
YOU'VE BEEN GIVEN FREE REIN OF THIS PLACE?
PLUCK
I'M SIMPLY ALLOWED TO GROW WHATEVER I LIKE.

WHAT SHE LIKES?
DO YOU ENJOY MEDICINAL HERBS?
YES AND NO.
FWIP
...DOESN'T SEEM LIKE THE OVERLY ENTHUSIASTIC TYPE.
I'M NOT REALLY ONE TO TALK...
...BUT THIS SUIREI...
GLANCE
WHAT ARE YOU GROWING?

A MEDICINE TO BRING SOMEONE BACK TO LIFE.

TELL ME!
I—!
I WANT TO KNOW MORE !!
ばっ
GRAB
IT WAS A MERE JEST.
HEH.

...A JEST.
SHP
A DRUG TO REVIVE THE DEAD.
PA ONCE TOLD ME...
...OF A MEDICINE WITH A SIMILAR EFFECT.
BUT IT'S STILL A FAR CRY FROM THE OFT DESIRED CURE FOR DEATH.
IF ONE TRULY EXISTED, THEN I WOULD GIVE ANYTHING TO HAVE IT.

I'M TOLD ...
RIP
RIP
...THAT YOU'RE AN APOTH-ECARY.
I'M CURIOUS TO KNOW JUST HOW GOOD OF ONE YOU ARE.
WHO AM I TO SAY?
I DON'T KNOW WHERE SHE HEARD ABOUT ME BEING AN APOTH-ECARY...
...BUT HER PHRASING ALMOST SOUNDED LIKE A CHALLENGE.
120

IT WON'T BE FOR A LITTLE WHILE YET...
...BUT I'LL BE PLANTING MORNING GLORIES HERE.
SHPDD

GOOD DAY TO YOU.